

United States Embassy, Malaysia

Security Message for U.S. Citizens: *Security Reminder on Travel to Eastern Sabah*

October 8, 2014

The Embassy remains concerned that the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) may target U.S. citizens for kidnapping near the coastal resorts and islands in Eastern Sabah. These areas are detailed in the Safety and Security section of the Department of State's Country Specific Information for Malaysia. The full text is included in this message. The U.S. Embassy encourages all U.S. citizens to review this important security information.

THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY: The Department of State remains concerned about the possibility of terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens in Southeast Asia. Extremist groups in the region have demonstrated the capability to carry out attacks in locations where Westerners congregate, and these groups do not distinguish between civilian and official targets. The U.S. government has designated two such groups, Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), as Foreign Terrorist Organizations. JI, which has a known presence in Malaysia, is linked to al-Qaeda and other regional terrorist groups and has cells operating throughout Southeast Asia.

U.S. citizens should consider the risks associated with travel to coastal eastern Sabah (Eastern Malaysia) due to the threat from both terrorist and criminal groups. Employees of the U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur are prohibited from travelling to most of this area without prior permission from the security office and Ambassador. This permission requirement for U.S. embassy employees indicates a strong concern over safety.

U.S. citizens are accordingly advised against travel to the coastal resorts in Eastern Sabah. This area includes the beach areas of Sandakan, Semporna and Beluran Districts, resorts along the Kinabatangan River (Sukau District) and Sabahan River (Kunak District, and the following resort islands: Selingan, Lankayan, Mabul, Pom Pom, Kapalai, Ligitan, Sipadan, and Matakong. Kidnappings-for-ransom occur frequently in these areas. In mid-November 2013, a foreign tourist was killed and his spouse was abducted from a resort on Pom Pom Island. In August 2013, Malaysian officials reported an aborted attempt by an armed Filipino group to kidnap foreign tourists from the resort island of Mabul. In addition to incursions on the coastal or island resort islands themselves, criminal or terrorist bands may attempt to intercept boats ferrying tourists from the mainland to the resort islands.

U.S. citizens are also advised against travel to the peninsular Lahad Datu district (to include the Tabin Wildlife Reserve). In early February 2013, armed intruders

from the Sulu archipelago, who had entered the area by sea from the southern Philippines, were involved in a violent confrontation with Malaysian security forces in the district. The entire eastern portion of Sabah (extending from the town of Kudat in the north to Tawau district near the border of Indonesia) has been designated as the Eastern Sabah Security Zone, and an Eastern Sabah Security Command has been established to coordinate security forces' activity. There is a significant police and army presence in the area, and road checkpoints have increased. The Malaysian government has also enhanced efforts to patrol its maritime border with the Philippines, but the size and remoteness of the coastal region makes it possible there may be future security incidents.

Most tourists travel directly (via transportation arranged by tour operators and hotels) from Lahad Datu airport to the resorts in the inland Danum Valley. If you plan travel to the area, we recommend you use direct transit arranged by reputable companies.

We strongly recommend that U.S. citizens traveling to or residing in Malaysia enroll in the [Department of State's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](https://www.travel.state.gov) at www.travel.state.gov. STEP enrollment gives you the latest security updates, and makes it easier for the U.S. embassy or nearest U.S. consulate to contact you in an emergency. If you don't have Internet access, enroll directly with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Regularly monitor the [State Department's website](https://travel.state.gov), where you can find current Travel Warnings, Travel Alerts, and the Worldwide Caution. Read the [Country Specific Information for Malaysia](#). For additional information, refer to the ["Traveler's Checklist"](#) on the State Department's website.

Contact the embassy or consulate for up-to-date information on travel restrictions. You can also call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays). Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) to have travel information at your fingertips.

The U.S. Embassy in Kuala Lumpur is located at 376 Jalan Tun Razak 50400, Kuala Lumpur and is open 8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. If you are a U.S. citizen and have any questions or concerns, please call the U.S. Embassy at (03) 2168-5000 or visit the U.S. Citizens Service website at <http://malaysia.usembassy.gov/>. We will post the most updated information on the website.